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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001617

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: BRV SENDING MIXED MESSAGES ON DIALOGUE WITH USG

REF: A. CARACAS 01340

[1](#)B. CARACAS 01526

[1](#)C. CARACAS 01581

[1](#)D. CARACAS 01465

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. BRV officials have privately expressed interest in working with the incoming Ambassador on a practical agenda, but President Chavez' recent public remarks appear to preclude cooperation. During a televised August 2 speech, Chavez dismissed the possibility of dialogue under the current U.S. administration and anticipated a more fruitful relationship after the 2008 U.S. elections. The ever fickle Chavez, however, has at times also expressed doubts about working with a future Democratic administration.

Interestingly, Chavez continues to carefully distinguish between the American people and the USG. At the same time, Chavez never misses an opportunity to blame the United States for the innumerable problems afflicting Venezuela. While not new, Chavez' verbal attacks cast doubt on the BRV's desire to pursue constructive cooperation in the coming year. END SUMMARY.

Chavez: Bilateral Dialogue Unlikely

[1](#)2. (SBU) In a televised August 2 ceremony to swear in new members of the Popular Power for Community Councils' (Poder Communal) "mobile units," President Chavez discarded the likelihood of improved U.S.-Venezuelan relations in the short term. While addressing a group of visiting U.S. university students and professors, Chavez said the BRV is "certain that there does not exist the possibility of dialogue with the current U.S. administration because the President of the United States hates us." Chavez added, "it is incredibly difficult, I would even say impossible, to engage in any type of dialogue during (President Bush's) last year in office."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Similarly, Chavez recently expressed interest in the 2008 presidential election campaign, suggesting that new USG leadership would represent a shift in USG policy toward Venezuela. During a televised speech August 5 from the presidential palace Miraflores, Chavez argued that an "awakening" was taking place in the United States and expressed hope that those "currents of consciousness" would "bring to a halt the madness of the empire." Chavez appealed to the American people to bring about these changes. Chavez

reiterated these sentiments during an interview with Argentine journalists August 7, saying he is hopeful a new U.S. administration will treat Venezuela with respect. In a separate instance the ever fickle Chavez in response to a question regarding the high profile of Democratic candidate Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton said he had "few reasons to be optimistic" regarding an improvement in relations because Democratic administrations have also "dropped bombs, invaded countries, sponsored coups, and backed dictatorships."

Mixed Messages

¶4. (C) Chavez' August 2 remarks contradict earlier statements by BRV officials who expressed interest in resuming dialogue with USG officials. In a farewell meeting between BRV Vice Foreign Minister Jorge Valero and the former Ambassador, both agreed on the need to establish channels of communication and discussed possible areas for cooperation between the BRV and the incoming Ambassador (Ref. A). Likewise, in a meeting between Valero and the Charge July 30, Valero reiterated that the BRV was open to dialogue particularly on issues of mutual interest, but argued that the relationship was contingent upon "USG respect for Venezuelan sovereignty" (Ref. B). During the meeting, Valero noted that the BRV is waiting for the arrival of the new Ambassador in order to begin discussion on pending issues.

Affinity for the "American People"

¶5. (SBU) Chavez goes to great lengths to distinguish between the American public and the USG by juxtaposing the lack of high-level engagement with his grassroots connection to American citizens who are sympathetic to his policies.

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Chavez routinely appeals to the American public by employing the enduring term "pueblo," but refers to the USG as a "blood-thirsty dracula" or as the "empire." There is also a noticeable increase in the number of American citizens serving as special guests at BRV events or on Chavez' weekly Sunday television show "Alo, Presidente" (Ref. C). During his nearly eight-hour program on August 5, for example, Chavez read a declaration of solidarity from the mayor of a town in Georgia and allowed the mayor's representatives the opportunity to speak on camera. In his August 2 address, Chavez urged Americans to visit Venezuela so they can "tell the American public the truth about what is really going on here."

¶6. (SBU) To further attempt to show that he has no ill-will towards the American people, Chavez has expended a considerable amount of money on projects aimed at helping poor communities in the United States. The local press reported August 7 that the state oil company PDVSA, through its U.S. distributor Citgo, plans to donate USD 3.3 million over the next three years to nine NGOs in the Bronx, New York. Interestingly, the announcement comes at a time when the BRV is harshly criticizing international donor support for Venezuelan NGOs. The BRV's newest project is in addition to the USD 9 million deal brokered between Representative Delahunt and Chavez in 2005 to provide heating gas to Massachusetts residents at a preferential rate in 2006, a deal involving over 25 million gallons of gas to the Bronx in 2006, as well as other fuel subsidy programs through Citgo.

U.S. Is To Blame

¶7. (SBU) In the months following the BRV's closure of RCTV, Chavez' verbal attacks were primarily directed at local groups he considered "enemies of the revolution," including

the independent media, university students, the opposition, and the Catholic Church. Chavez never fully stopped wielding insults at the United States during that period, although there was a noticeable reduction in his criticism toward USG.

Now that RCTV-related protests have all but ceased, Chavez has reverted back to blaming essentially all of Venezuela's problems on the United States.

18. (SBU) In his August 2 speech alone, Chavez blamed the U.S. for Venezuela's inability to secure admittance into Mercosur; for the negative media attention Chavez' Latin America tour received; for PDVSA's shortage of oil rigs; for the BRV's negative international image; and for a pastoral letter issued by Venezuelan Catholic Church officials harshly criticizing Chavez' plans to reform the 1999 Constitution (Ref. D). Further, Chavez continued to blame the United States for Venezuela's delayed entrance into Mercosur during an interview August 7 with Argentine journalists. While Chavez' attacks against the United States are not new, his recent remarks are unrelenting and disconcerting.

Comment

19. (C) Chavez thrives on having an adversary and he has shown that the USG is his preferred target. Only recently, however, and with some frequency, has he publicly discarded the possibility of working with the USG, regardless of the administration. At the same time, some BRV officials have privately raised the possibility of engagement with the incoming Ambassador. It remains to be seen whether Chavez' remarks will preclude quiet diplomacy on issues of mutual interest in the coming year.

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